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# The Gentleman From Indiana

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

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"I should say not," said William, with a deep frown and a jerk of his head toward the rear of the house. "He jokes about it enough. Wouldn't even promise to carry a gun after this. Said he wouldn't know how to use it—never shot one off since he was a boy, on the Fourth of July. This is the third time he's been shot at this year, but he says the others was at a what'd he call it?"

"A merely complimentary range," Briscoe supplied. He handed William a cigar and bit the end off another himself. "Minnie, you better go in the house and read. I expect, unless you want to go down to the creek and join those folks."

"Me!" she exclaimed. "I know when to stay away, I guess. Do go and put that terrible gun up."

"No," said Briscoe lighting his cigar deliberately. "It's all safe; there's no question of that; but maybe William and I better go out and take a smoke in the orchard as long as they stay down at the creek."

In the garden shafts of white light pierced the bordering trees and fell where June roses breathed the mild night breeze, and here, through summer spells, the editor of the Herald and the lady who had run to him at the pasture bars strolled down a path trembling with shadows to where the creek tinkled over the pebbles. They walked slowly, with an air of being well accustomed friends and comrades, and for some reason it did not strike either of them as unnatural or extraordinary. They came to a bench on the bank, and he made a great fuss dusting the seat for her with his black slouch hat. Then he regretted the hat—it was a shabby old hat of a Carlow county farmer.

It was a long bench, and he seated himself rather remotely toward the end opposite her, suddenly realizing that he had walked very close to her coming down the narrow garden path. Neither knew that neither had spoken since they left the veranda, and it had taken them a long time to come through the little orchard and the garden. She rested her chin on her hand, leaning forward and looking steadily at the creek. Her laughter had quite gone; her attitude seemed a little wistful and a little sad. He noted that her hair curled over her brow in a way he had not pictured in the lady of his dreams. This was so much prettier. He did not care for tall girls. He had not cared for them for almost half an hour. It was so much more beautiful to be dainty and small and pliant. He had no notion that he was sighing in a way that would have put a furnace to shame, but he turned his eyes from her because he feared that if he looked longer he might blurt out some speech about her loveliness. His

in the perturbation of comedy I forgot.

"It was melodrama, wasn't it?" she said. He laughed, but she shook her head.

"Purest comedy," he said gayly, "except your part of it. You shouldn't have done it. This evening was not arranged in honor of 'visiting ladies.' But you mustn't think me a comedian. Truly, I didn't plan it. My friend from Six Crossroads must be given the credit of devising the scene, though you divined it."

"It was a little too picturesque, I think. I know about Six Crossroads. Please tell me what you mean to do."

"Nothing. What should I?"

"You mean that you will keep on letting them shoot at you until they—until you?"

"She struck the bench angrily with her hand."

"There's no summer theater in Six Crossroads. There's not even a church. Why shouldn't they?" he asked gravely. "During the long and tedious evenings it cheers the poor Crossroaders' soul to drop over here and take a shot at me. It whiles away dull care for him, and he has the additional exercise of running all the way home."

"Ah!" she cried indignantly. "They told me you always answered like this."

"Well, you see, the Crossroads efforts have proved so thoroughly hygienic for me. As a patriot I have sometimes felt extreme mortification that such bad marksmanship should exist in the county, but I console myself with the thought that their best shots are, unhappily, in the penitentiary."

"There are many left. Can't you understand that they will organize again and come in a body, as they did before you broke them up? And then, if they come on a night when they know you are wandering out of town?"

"You have not had the advantage of an intimate study of the most exclusive people of the Crossroads, Miss Sherwood. There are about thirty gentlemen who remain in that neighborhood while their relatives sojourn under discipline. If you had the entire over there, you would understand that these thirty could not gather themselves into a company and march the seven miles without physical debate in the ranks. They are not precisely amiable people, even among themselves. They would quarrel and shoot one another to pieces long before they got here."

"But they worked in a company once."

"Never for seven miles. Four miles was their radius. Five would see them all dead."

She struck the bench again. "Oh, you laugh at me! You make a joke of your own life and death and laugh at everything. Have five years of Plattville taught you to do that?"

"I laugh only at taking the poor Crossroaders too seriously. I don't laugh at your running into fire to help a fellow mortal."

"I knew there wasn't any risk. I knew he had to stop to load before he shot again."

"He did shoot again. If I had known you before tonight, I"—His tone changed, and he spoke gravely. "I am at your feet in worship of your divine philanthropy. It's so much sinner to risk your life for a stranger than for a friend."

"That is a man's point of view, isn't it?"

"You risked yours for a man you had never seen before."

"Oh, no. I saw you at the lecture. I heard you introduce the Hon. Mr. Holloway."

"Then I don't understand your wishing to save me."

She smiled unwillingly and turned her gray eyes upon him with troubled sunshine, and under the sweetness of her regard he set a watch upon his lips, though he knew it would not avail him long. He had driven along respectfully so far, he thought, but he had the sentimental longings of years, starved of expression, culminating in his heart. She continued to look at him wistfully, searchingly, gently. They her eyes traveled over his big frame, from his shoes (a patch of moonlight fell on them; they were dusty; he drew them under the bench with a shudder) to his broad shoulders (he shook the stoop out of them). She stretched her small white hands toward him and looked at them in contrast and broke into the most delicious low laughter in the world. At this he knew the watch on his lips was worthless. It was a question of minutes till he should present himself to her eyes as a sentimental and susceptible imbecile. He knew it. He was in wild spirits.

"Could you realize that one of your dangers might be a shaking?" she cried. "Is your seriousness a lost art?" Her laughter ceased suddenly. "Ah, no! I understand Thiers said the French laugh always in order not to weep. I haven't lived here five years. I should laugh, too, if I were you."

"Look at the moon," he responded. "We Plattvillians own that with the best of metropolitans, and, for my part, I see more of it here. You do not appreciate us. We have large landscapes in the heart of the city, and what other

capital has advantages like that? Next winter the railway station is to have a new stove for the waiting room. Heaven itself is one of our suburbs—it is so close that all one has to do is to die. You insist upon my being French, you see, and I know you are fond of nonsense. How did you happen to put 'The Walrus and the Carpenter' at the bottom of a page of Flisbee's notes?"

"Was it? How were you sure it was it?"

"In Carlow county?"

"He might have written it himself."

"Flisbee has never in his life read anything lighter than canine infcriptions."

"Miss Briscoe—"

"She doesn't read Lewis Carroll, and it was not her hand. What made you write it on Flisbee's manuscript?"

"He was here this afternoon. I teased him a little about your heading in the Herald—'Business and the Cradle, the Altar and the Grave,' isn't it?"

—and he said it had always troubled him, but your predecessor had used it, and you thought it good. So do I. He

asked me if I could think of anything that you might like better and put in place of it and I wrote 'The Time Has Come,' because it was the only thing I could think of that was as appropriate and as fetching as your headlines. He was perfectly dear about it. He was so serious. He said he feared it wouldn't be acceptable. I didn't notice that the paper he handed me to write on was part of his notes; nor did he, I think. Afterward he put it back in his pocket. It wasn't a message."

"I'm not so sure he did not notice. He is very wise. Do you know, I have the impression that the old fellow wanted me to meet you."

"How dear and good of him!" She spoke earnestly, and her face was suffused with a warm light. There was no doubt about her meaning what she said.

"It was," John answered unsteadily. "He knew how great was my need of a few minutes' companionship with—"

"No," she interrupted. "I meant dear and good to me. I think he was thinking of me. It was for my sake he wanted us to meet."

It might have been hard to convince a woman if she had overheard this speech that Miss Sherwood's humility was not the calculated affectation of a coquette. Sometimes a man's unsuspicion is wiser, and Harkless knew that she was not flirting with him. In addition, he was not a fatuous man; he did not extend the implication of her words nearly so far as she would have had him.

"But I had met you," said he, "long ago."

"What?" she cried, and her eyes danced. "You actually remember?"

"Yes. Do you?" he answered. "I stood in Jones' field and heard you singing, and I remembered. It was a long time since I had heard you sing."

"I was a ruffler of Flanders and fought for a forin's hire. You were the dame of my captain and sang to my heart's desire."

"But that is the balladist's notion. The truth is that you were a lady at the court of Clovis, and I was a heathen captive. I heard you sing a Christian hymn and asked for baptism."

She did not seem overpleased with his fancy, for the surprise fading from her face, "Oh, that was the way you remembered," she said.

"Perhaps it was not that way alone. You won't despise me for being mawkish tonight?" he asked. "I haven't had the chance for so long."

The night air wrapped them warmly, and the balm of the little breezes that stirred the foliage around them was the smell of damask roses from the garden. The creek splashed over the pebbles at their feet, and a drowsy bird, half wakened by the moon, crooned languorously in the sycamores. The girl looked out at the sparkling water through downcast lashes. "Is it because it is so transient that beauty is pathetic," she said, "because we can never come back to it in quite the same way? I am a sentimental girl. If you are born so it is never entirely teased out of you, is it? Besides, tonight is all a dream. It isn't real, you know. You couldn't be mawkish."

Her tone was gentle as a caress, and it made him tingle to his finger tips. "How do you know?" he asked.

"I just know. Do you think I'm very bold and forward?" she said dreamily.

"It was your song I wanted to be sentimental about. I am like one 'who through long days of toil—only that doesn't quite apply—and nights devoid of ease,' but I can't claim that one doesn't sleep well here; it is Plattville's specialty—like one who—"

"Still heard in his soul the music Of wonderful melodies."

"Yes," she answered, "to come here and to do what you have done and to live this isolated village life that must be so desperately dry and dull for a man of your sort, and yet to have the kind of heart that makes wonderful melodies sing in itself—oh," she cried, "I say that is fine!"

"You do not understand," he returned sadly, wishing before her to be unmercifully just to himself. "I came here because I couldn't make a living anywhere else. And the 'wonderful melodies'—I have only known you one evening—and the melodies"—He rose to his feet and took a few steps toward the garden. "Come," he said, "let me take you back. Let us go before I—"

He finished with a helpless laugh. She stood by the bench, one hand resting on it. She stood all in the tremulant shadow. She moved one step toward him, and a single long silver of light pierced the sycamores and fell upon her head. He gasped.

"What was it about the melodies?" she said.

"Nothing. I don't know how to thank you for this evening that you have given me. I—suppose you are leaving tomorrow. No one ever stays here. I—"

"What about the melodies?"

He gave it up. "The moon makes people insane!" he cried.

"If that is true, then you need not be more afraid than I, because 'people' is plural. What were you saying about?"

"I had heard them—in my heart. When I heard your voice tonight I knew that it was you who sang them there, had been singing them for me all ways."

"So!" she cried gayly. "All that debate about a pretty speech!" Then, sinking before him in a courtesy, "I am beholden to you," she said. "Do you think no man ever made a little flattery for me before tonight?"

At the edge of the orchard, where they could keep an unseen watch on the garden and the bank of the creek, Judge Briscoe and Mr. Todd were concealed under an apple tree, the former still armed with his shotgun. When the young people got up from their bench, the two men rose hastily, then sauntered slowly toward them. When they met, Harkless shook each of them cor-

dially by the hand, without seeming to know it.

"We were coming to look for you," explained the judge. "William was afraid to go home alone—thought some one might take him for Mr. Harkless and shoot him before he got into town. Can you come out with Willetts in the morning, Harkless?" he went on, "and go with the young ladies to see the parade? And Minnie wants you to stay to dinner and go to the show with them in the afternoon."

Harkless seized his hand and shook it and then laughed heartily as he accepted the invitation.

At the gate Miss Sherwood extended her hand to him and said politely, while mockery shone from her eyes: "Good night, Mr. Harkless. I do not leave tomorrow. I am very glad to have met you."

"We are going to keep her all summer, if we can," said Minnie, waving her arm about her friend's waist. "You'll come in the morning?"

"Good night, Miss Sherwood," he returned hilariously. "It has been such a pleasure to meet you. Thank you so much for saving my life. It was very good of you, indeed. Yes; in the morning. Good night, good night." He shook hands with all of them, including Mr. Todd, who was going with him. He laughed all the way home, and William walked at his side in amazement.

The Herald building was a decrepit frame structure on Main street. It had once been a small warehouse and was now sadly in need of paint. Closely adjoining it, in a large, blank looking yard, stood a low brick cottage, over which the second story of the old warehouse leaned in an effect of tipsy affection that had reminded Harkless, when he first saw it, of an old Sunday school book woodcut of an inebriated parent under convoy of a devoted child. The title to these two buildings and the blank yard had been included in the purchase of the Herald, and the cottage was the editor's home.

There was a light burning upstairs in the Herald office. From the street a broad, tumbledown stairway ran up on the outside of the building to the second floor, and at the stairway railing John turned and shook his companion warmly by the hand.

"Good night, William," he said. "It was plucky of you to join in that muss tonight. I shan't forget it."

"I jest happened to come along," replied the other awkwardly. Then, with a portentous yawn, he asked, "Ain't ye goin' to bed?"

"No; Parker wouldn't allow it."

"Well," observed William, with another yawn, which threatened to expose the veritable soul of him, "I d'know how ye stand it. It's close on 11 o'clock. Good night."

John went up the steps, singing aloud—

"For tonight we'll merry, merry be, For tonight we'll merry, merry be," and stopped on the sagging platform at the top of the stairs and gave the moon good night with a wave of the hand, and friendly laughter. At this it suddenly struck him that he was twenty-nine years of age and that he had laughed a great deal that evening; laughed and laughed over things not in the least humorous, like an excited schoolboy making a first formal call; that he had shaken hands with Miss Briscoe when he left her as if he should never see her again; that he had taken Miss Sherwood's hand twice in one very temporary parting; that he had shaken the judge's hand five times and William's four.

"Idiot!" he cried. "What has happened to me?" Then he shook his fist at the moon and went in to work, he thought.

(Continued Next Sunday.)

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Neither knew that neither had spoken.

glance rested on the bank, but its diameter included the edge of her white skirt and the tip of a little white, high heeled slipper that peeped out from beneath, and he had to look away from that, too, to keep from telling her that he meant to advocate a law compelling all women to wear crisp white gowns and white kid slippers on moonlight nights.

She picked a long spear of grass from the turf before her, twisted it absently in her fingers, then turned to him slowly. Her lips parted as if to speak. Then she turned away again. The action was so odd, somehow, as she did it, so adorable, and the preserved silence was such a bond between them, that for his life he could not have helped moving half way up the bench toward her.

"What is it?" he asked, and he spoke in a whisper such as he might have used at the bedside of a dying friend. He would not have laughed if he had known he did so. She twisted the spear of grass into a little ball and threw it at a stone in the water before she answered:

"Do you know, Mr. Harkless, you and I have not 'met,' have we? Didn't we forget to be presented to each other?"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Sherwood."